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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 12/11/07

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3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, December 9

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

Morning

Stayed at his official residence in Nozawa.

17:43

Attended a foreign policy study meeting held at the Hotel Okura.

20:53

Returned to his residence.

Prime Minister's schedule, December 10

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NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

08:24

Met Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Iwaki at the Kantei.

09:00

Attended an Upper House Audit Committee meeting.

12:06

Attended a government and ruling coalition liaison meeting at the Kantei. Afterward met Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura.

13:00

Attended the Upper House Audit Committee meeting.

17:03

Attended an LDP executive meeting. Afterward met LDP tax commission chief Tsushima and subcommittee chief Yosano.

17:41

Met Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Futahashi at the Kantei.

18:02

Held talks with President Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka and a joint press conference. Afterward hosted with his wife a dinner party for the president.

21:14

Returned to his private residence.

4) Poll: Public split over antiterror bill

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)  
December 11, 2007

A new bill is now before the Diet to resume the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean. In the event the House of Councillors votes down the legislation, the House of Representatives may override the opposition-dominated upper chamber's decision with the ruling coalition's concurring majority of two-thirds. In a recent face-to-face public opinion survey conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun on Dec. 8-9, respondents were asked if they thought it would be appropriate for the Diet's lower chamber to do so. In response to this question, 43 PERCENT answered "yes," with 44 PERCENT saying "no."

Respondents were also asked if they supported the new antiterror legislation. To this question, 45 PERCENT answered "yes," with 43 PERCENT saying "no." Among those who answered "yes," 66 PERCENT think it is appropriate to override the upper chamber's decision, while 26 PERCENT think it is inappropriate to do so. Among those

who answered "no," 69 PERCENT think it is inappropriate to do so, but the proportion of those who think it is appropriate also reached 25 PERCENT .

Respondents were further asked if they supported the government's plan to resume the MSDF's refueling activities. To this question, 48 PERCENT answered "yes," with 41 PERCENT saying "no." In this October's survey and in the following survey, "yes" accounted for nearly 50 PERCENT and "no" at around 40 PERCENT .

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In the breakdown of public support for political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 35.3 PERCENT , up slightly from the last survey taken in November (34.3 PERCENT ). The leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) was at 17.1 PERCENT , down 5.4 percentage points.

The rate of public support for the Fukuda cabinet was 52.5 PERCENT (52.2 PERCENT in the last survey). The nonsupport rate was 35.3 PERCENT (36.0 PERCENT in the last survey).

5) Sympathy budget for U.S. forces in final stage of negotiations

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

Japan and the United States are in the final stage of intergovernmental negotiations to revise an agreement regarding Japan's host nation support (omoiyari yosan or literally "sympathy budget") for U.S. Forces Japan. The Japanese government insists on the necessity of cutting down on its budgetary burden of hosting USFJ due to financial stringency. The U.S. government is strongly opposed to reduction. The Japanese government wants to settle the negotiations within this week. However, its negotiating ministries are getting out of step. The final cutback is expected to be downscaled in consideration of relations with the United States.

"We wanted to settle the talks last month," Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi said in a news conference yesterday. "But," Yachi went on, "we couldn't reach an agreement." He added, "We're now in working out details in connection with budget compilation." With this, he stressed that the negotiations are now in the final stage.

The sympathy budget is made up of two portions, which are under the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and a special agreement. The SOFA portion covers outlays for U.S. military facilities in Japan, amounting to 76.5 billion yen for FY2007. The special agreement portion covers basic wages for Japanese employees working at U.S. military bases in Japan. In addition, this special slot covers utilities, amounting to 140.8 billion yen. The current agreement is for a period of two years up until the end of next year. However, the Japanese and U.S. governments are coordinating to enter into a new agreement for a period of three years.

The Japanese government, centering on the Finance Ministry, proposed cutting back on utilities currently up to approximately 25 billion yen. The U.S. government is strongly opposed to the proposed cutback in the coverage of utilities because of the growing amount of military costs for the Iraq war and antiterror mop-up operations in Afghanistan.

The Foreign Ministry asked the Finance Ministry for special consideration. "For the United States, the sympathy budget is a priority issue that is on a par with the new refueling legislation or beyond it," a senior official of the Foreign Ministry said. The Finance Ministry is seeking to reduce maintenance costs for provided facilities and is also looking for other budget-cutting ways that will not directly affect the United States.

There is a time limit to the ongoing negotiations, so the government is also expected to maintain the special agreement and reduce the

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sympathy budget as a whole.

6) Environmental assessment for Futenma relocation may start in January; Government and Okinawa still at odds over altering plan

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

The government has decided to begin as early as next January an environmental impact assessment of the coastal area of Camp Schwab in Nago, the relocation site for the Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station in Ginowan. The government, Okinawa, and affected municipalities are expected to confirm "efforts for the smooth implementation of the assessment" at their Futenma relocation consultative meeting tomorrow. The relocation plan has taken a step forward with the start of the environment impact assessment, the basis for building an airport. Nevertheless, the plan's future is still murky because the government and Okinawa still remain at loggerheads over making changes to the alternative facility, coupled with the bribery and corruption scandals involving the Ministry of Defense (MOD).

The government announced yesterday that the Futenma relocation consultative council would meet tomorrow, following the last meeting on Nov. 7. At the council meeting, views will be exchanged on the alternative facility construction plan after confirming the start of the environmental impact assessment and its specific procedures. In August this year, the then Naha Defense Facilities Administration Bureau (currently the Okinawa Defense Bureau) sent to the prefectural government a notice specifying the outline of the environmental impact assessment to be conducted by MOD. But the prefectural government reacted strongly to it, saying it contains many flaws. This made it difficult for Japan to realize the relocation by 2014, as was agreed upon with the United States.

Given the situation, Tokyo earlier this month renewed its call for an early implementation of the environmental assessment, and Okinawa accepted it in principle. About the background of Okinawa's acceptance of the assessment, a ruling party member explained: "Okinawa shares the desire for pushing the planned relocation forward. Okinawa probably needed the steady implementation of the economic package for the prefecture."

Given bright prospects for starting the assessment, the government plans to implement shortly the Okinawa northern area economic package (10 billion yen for fiscal 2007) that has been frozen.

The government plans to build a V-shaped pair of runways at the coastline of Camp Schwab, but Governor Hirokazu Nakaima has asked the government to move them out to sea, saying, "They would have adverse effects on the living and natural environments; it is not the best plan." But the government is insisting on building the runways, as planned, and the two sides remains at odds. At tomorrow's meeting, they are expected to simply confirm continued talks on the construction plan. Once the environmental impact assessment is over, the government will file a request with the governor to allow the central government to reclaim public waters around Camp Schwab. If the governor rejects the request, the relocation plan might stall.

Former Administrative Vice-Defense Minister Takamasa Moriya, who is under arrest for taking bribes over the procurement of defense

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equipment, was deeply involved in the process of adopting the government plan. If there are unclear points in the process, calls for a review of the plan might grow louder.

7) Zenchuro plans third strike tomorrow

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

Talks between the All Japan Garrison Forces Labor Union (Zenchuro) and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) over reducing the salaries and

allowances of Japanese employees working at U.S. bases in Japan as part of the plan to review Japan's host-nation support (commonly called the sympathy budget) for U.S. forces in Japan are now in the final stage. The two sides held informal talks yesterday but failed to reach an accord. MOD plans to present a compromise plan in talks today. If agreement is not reached, Zenchuro is set to stage a third strike tomorrow.

8) Housing units on Guam that cost 70 million yen per unit "way too expensive," says defense minister

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba revealed at yesterday's House of Councillors Audit Committee session that the government has received a U.S. estimate that building housing units on Guam for U.S. Marines to be relocated from Okinawa would cost Japan approximately 610,000 dollars per unit. Ishiba expressed displeasure, saying: "Is it necessary to build housing units costing over 70 million yen (per unit) with taxpayer money? It is way too expensive from the perspective of ordinary people. We will ask for the basis of the estimate and closely examine it."

9) U.S. Embassy in Japan pays rent for first time in decade after refusing based on old document

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

The U.S. government had failed to pay rent on the approximately 130,000 square meters in state-owned land where its embassy is located (Minato Ward, Tokyo), since 1998. However, it has decided to start paying the rent after a 10 year hiatus. It had been opposed to a major hike in rent. However, since the rent for fiscal 1998 will reach the statute of limitations this month, the governments of both countries yesterday reached an agreement that the rent be raised in stages.

According to the Finance Ministry, rent for the U.S. Embassy has been revised twice in proportion to rises in the prices of nearby land. The annual rent from 1983 through 1997 was 2.52 million yen. When the ministry sounded out the embassy about a third increase, the U.S. side refused to pay based on a document signed more than a century ago, noting that since the contract signed in 1896 did not provision on a rise in rent, it was not possible to accept a request for a rent increase.

The governments of Japan and the U.S. agreed that the annual rent for 1998-2007 should be 7 million yen, rising to 10 million yen annually in 2008-2012 and to 15 million yen in 2013-2027. The U.S.

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has as of Dec. 10 paid 70 million yen covering the 10-year period.

10) LDP, New Komeito to decide today to re-extend extra Diet session until Jan. 15, with eye on two-thirds majority vote on new antiterrorism bill

SANKEI (Page 3) (Slightly abridged)  
December 11, 2007

The government and ruling parties has decided to re-extend until Jan. 15 the current extraordinary Diet session, which will end on Dec. 15. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and New Komeito Chief Representative Akihiro Ota will meet today to make a formal decision. With the present political situation, in which the ruling coalition holds a majority in the House of Representatives and the opposition camp controls the House of Councillors, there is no prospect that a new antiterrorism special measures bill will be enacted into law during the current session. The government and ruling camp have, therefore, determined that it is necessary to secure more days for a two-thirds vote in the Lower House, which is allowed by Article 59 of the Constitution, which stipulates that if the Upper House fails to take a vote on a bill within 60 days after it received it from the Lower House, it may be determined that the

lower chamber rejected the bill. As the government and ruling coalition have generally decided to convene a regular session on Jan. 18, the ongoing session will continue until early January next year.

Since opposition parties, including the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), have strongly opposed a lengthy re-extension of the extra session, chances are that a planned one-on-one meeting between the Prime Minister and DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa will be canceled. If the bill is readopted by a two-thirds majority vote at the Lower House based on Article 59, useless Upper House debates might be prolonged. So, there is also a possibility of the tug-of-war between the ruling and opposition camps intensifying at the end of the year and beginning of the new year.

Ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima held a meeting yesterday with his DPJ counterpart Kenji Yamaoka, in which Oshima said:

"Instead of looking into a possibility of a permanent law on overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), I want the Upper House to put the bill on a vote before the end of the year."

The meeting, however, ended in a failure, as Yamaoka insisted that top priority should be on shedding light on a series of scandals involving the Defense Ministry, including the bribery scandal caused by former Administrative Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya.

Given that, Oshima discussed the matter with LDP Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki and New Komeito Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Yoshio Urushibara. As a result, the three have decided that there is no other choice but to re-extend the current Diet session (until mid-January). The New Komeito, which had balked previously at a lengthy Diet extension, reportedly showed understanding toward the idea.

11-1) Ruling coalition decides to use Lower House revote to force through new antiterrorism bill, given distrust in DPJ

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TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
December 11, 2007

The government and the ruling camp have decided to extend the current Diet session until the middle of January and force through the new antiterrorism bill by a two-thirds House of Councillors overriding vote. It is conceivable that the government may be forced to dissolve the House of Representatives for a snap election as a result of the standoff between the ruling and opposition camps escalating, but Prime Minister Fukuda seems to be making up his mind to do so. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) will also be pressed to decide on whether to submit a censure motion against Prime Minister Fukuda early next year.

In the ruling camp, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Bunmei Ibuki, Executive Council Chairman Toshihiro Nikai, and Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Omori met at party headquarters yesterday to make preparations for re-extending the Diet session.

The ruling bloc has been discussing the length of extension of the Diet session, focusing on one month. In order to secure the enactment of the antiterror bill in the current Diet session, it is necessary to continue the session until January 12, when it becomes possible for the ruling coalition to use Lower House revote under the Constitution.

But some LDP members and the New Komeito insisted that the length of extension should be a week or 10 days. If the government decides an unusual year-crossing extension, it will inevitably affect the process of compiling the FY2008 budget. Additionally, the Diet may be thrown into chaos, and the government may be pressed to dissolve the Lower House early next year.

However, a DPJ member now assumes the chairmanship of the Upper House Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, where deliberations on

the antiterror bill are going on. Given this, the ruling coalition has judged it necessary to extend the Diet session through next year, even if there is some effect on the budget compilation. One lawmaker remarked: "If the Diet is extended for a short period and if the DPJ refuses to take a vote on the bill, the bill will be abandoned, with deliberations incomplete. Even if the DPJ pledges beforehand to take a vote, we cannot trust it."

11-2) Sense of concern behind DPJ's strong opposition to lengthy extension of Diet session

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
December 11, 2007

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) yesterday strongly opposed the government's plan to re-extend the current Diet session for a lengthy period. In the case of a lengthy extension, the new antiterrorism bill will surely be passed by a two-thirds House of Representatives overriding vote and the main opposition party will be eventually driven into a difficult situation.

DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama told reporters in Tokyo yesterday: "The session has already been extended by 35 days. It is outrageous that (the ruling camp) say more extra days are needed. A year-crossing Diet session contains an unstable factor. The government should not decide to do so for the sake of the people."

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DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka also said during his separate meetings with his counterparts Tadamori Oshima of the Liberal Democratic Party and Yoshio Urushibara of the New Komeito: "If the session is extended further, three problems will emerge." As one problem, Yamaoka cited the possibility that former House of Councillors member Junichi Fukumoto, whose name was removed from the DPJ membership list, may be summoned as an unsworn witness, keeping in mind the New Komeito's unwillingness to allow his relations with the Soka Gakkai, its support group, to be taken up at the Diet

A sense of concern is behind the DPJ's strong reaction to a lengthy extension, because if the ruling coalition decides to use Lower House revote, the DPJ will be pressed to make a hard decision on whether to submit a censure motion against Prime Minister Fukuda to the Upper House.

12) Government decides to subsidize kerosene fees as measure against high crude oil prices: Conditions for repayment of loans small- and medium-size businesses have taken out from government-affiliated financial institutions to be eased

YOMIURI (Page 11) (Excerpts)  
December 11, 2007

The full text of basic guidelines to be adopted at an emergency cabinet meeting to be held to find measures to deal with high crude oil prices was revealed yesterday. As a cardinal feature of the package, the government will allocate special tax grants to local governments that subsidize kerosene fees for low-income earners. For small and medium-size businesses, which are suffering from high crude oil prices, it will ease conditions for the repayment of loans taken out from government-affiliated financial institutions. The government will formally adopt specific assistance measures within the year, based on the basic guidelines. Regarding measures that will require fiscal measures, it will make appropriations from the fiscal 2007 supplementary budget.

Subsidies for kerosene fees have been adopted with the welfare kerosene system implemented by Kushiro City, Hokkaido, in mind. Fifty municipalities in Hokkaido either have implemented or are planning a similar system in fiscal 2007. Under the system, local governments issue kerosene vouchers or discount tickets to elderly people and single-mother households. Though the amounts of subsidies vary, depending on municipalities, one household receives between several thousand yen and about 30,000 yen. The government at present has no such subsidy system. However, according to the basic guidelines, it will allocate special tax grants to local governments



that adopted such a system. Of the special local allocation tax, the use of 660 billion yen has not yet been decided. The government will likely use part of that money.

Special tax grants will also be allocated to local governments whose expenses to maintain communications systems by air and sea and a public bus service system in regional areas have increased.

13) Government's GDP forecast rate at around 2.0 PERCENT

SANKEI (Page 1) (Excerpts)  
December 11, 2007

It was revealed yesterday that the government was adjusting at around 2.0 PERCENT a growth rate of the gross domestic product

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(GDP) excluding an effect by price changes regarding economic outlook, which will become a premise for economic and fiscal management for fiscal 2008. A nominal growth rate is expected to be more than 2.0 PERCENT, putting an end to the trend in which the real rate of growth exceeds the nominal rate of growth, for the first time in 11 years. Meantime, the government intends to lower the growth rate of real GDP for 2007 to around 1.7 PERCENT from the initial projection of 2.1 PERCENT.

Since the government's economic outlook is a premise for the compilation of state budget for the coming year, it is approved by the cabinet around Dec. 20 and it is formally decided by the cabinet in January every year.

14) Bali climate change conference: Acrimonious exchange of views on chairman's proposal for cutting greenhouse gas emissions 25 PERCENT -40 PERCENT; Japan, U.S. at odds with EU

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

Bali, Indonesia, Hiroko Kono

The 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP13) yesterday entered full-fledged discussions on how to expedite international negotiations in the future and a road map for items up for consideration. However, the U.S. and Japan opposed the phrase "industrialized countries are to be urged to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 PERCENT -40 PERCENT by 2020, compared with 1990 levels" included in a joint proposal made by a working group and the chairman as a draft. Acrimonious exchanges of views are continuing with the European Union (EU), which supports the chairman's proposal.

The words in question are included in a preface to the main subject mentioning what should be decided at the session this time. The preface notes that in order to prevent the worst possible effects of climate change, it would be necessary for industrialized countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 PERCENT -40 PERCENT, the figures worked out based on science. The words are written in a manner that can be taken as a premise that all countries should accept.

Harlan Watson, senior climate negotiator and special representative of the U.S. State Department, during a press conference on Dec. 10 strongly criticized the proposal, saying, "The roadmap should allow no presuppositions regarding the outcome of future international negotiations. We cannot accept any numbers." Japan is also against the proposal, with a member of the government delegation noting, "Only the EU will be able to cut emissions by 25 PERCENT -40 PERCENT. Neither Japan nor the U.S. would be able to comply with a numerical goal."

In response, a delegate from the EU announced a stance that the chairman's proposal should incorporate numbers, noting that negotiations must be pursued based on science instead of politics. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer from the Netherlands during a press conference indicated his perception that the description, which

would become a focal point of future negotiations, would be indispensable. He underscored, "Numbers will indicate a direction of the talks."

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15) China's altering joint communique may adversely affect Japan-China friendship

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)  
December 11, 2007

The Chinese government released a document agreed at the Japan-China High-Level Economic Dialogue held in Beijing on Dec. 1, after altering the document. In this connection, some Japanese government officials are concerned about negative effects on the increasingly friendly mood between the two countries. With Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's visit to China approaching, the Japanese government intends to carefully deal with the matter, while it will continue to ask China to correct the document.

Administrative Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi stated with annoyance at a press conference: "Normally, this should never happen. Honestly, I am surprised at it."

The Japanese government has lodged a protest with China over this issue through diplomatic channels. The Chinese government reportedly, however, has not responded in a sincere manner, insisting that the document was released after deleting some part at the request of concerned departments and bureaus and that it was just a working-level agreement.

There is a growing view in the Foreign Ministry that the Chinese government might have been trying to keep the Chinese people from thinking that the document was forced on Beijing by Tokyo, as China deleted such parts as that 1) Japan hopes China will revalue the yuan, and 2) Japan urges China to participate in the energy Charter Treaty.

SCHIEFFER